Study Online with Open Christian University and Earn a State-licensed Qualification from California, USA

What Is Christian Science and How Do Its Teachings Diverge from Traditional Christianity?

Sixbert SANGWA • June 23, 2024

Christian Science, founded by Mary Baker Eddy in the late 19th century, presents a distinctive interpretation of Christianity that diverges in several significant ways from traditional Christian teachings. While Christian Science shares a commitment to the teachings of Jesus Christ, its views on the nature of sin, sickness, and the role of prayer and spiritual healing markedly differ from orthodox Christian beliefs. This brief article aims to provide a preface examination of these differences, rooted in biblical scripture and the broader context of Christian doctrine.

The Nature of Sin

Traditional Christianity views sin as a fundamental aspect of human existence post-Fall, emphasizing the inherent sinful nature of humanity and the need for redemption through Jesus Christ. The Bible states, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Sin is seen as a moral failing, an offense against God's holy law, necessitating confession and repentance (1 John 1:9).

In contrast, Christian Science posits that sin is primarily an illusion, a false belief about the nature of reality. Mary Baker Eddy taught that evil and sin have no real existence because God, who is entirely good, did not create them. This perspective diminishes the traditional understanding of sin's gravity and the need for atonement through Christ's sacrificial death. Christian Science emphasizes moral development and correction of thought rather than recognizing sin's real presence and its consequences.

The Nature of Sickness

The traditional Christian understanding of sickness is that it is a consequence of the fallen world and human mortality. While healing is possible through prayer and divine intervention, sickness is not merely an illusion but a tangible reality. The Bible recounts numerous instances of Jesus healing the sick, demonstrating God's power over illness (Matthew 8:16-17).
Conversely, Christian Science teaches that sickness is also an illusion, a false belief that can be overcome through a proper understanding of God's nature and human identity as spiritual beings. Eddy's key work, "*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures,*" asserts that recognizing the unreality of sickness leads to healing. This belief system places significant emphasis on spiritual healing, often to the exclusion of conventional medical treatment. Christian Scientists believe that spiritual understanding can correct physical conditions, aligning with Eddy's teachings that true healing comes from recognizing one's divine nature.

The Role of Prayer and Spiritual Healing

Prayer in traditional Christianity is a dialogue with God, encompassing adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. The New Testament encourages believers to pray for healing (James 5:14-16) while also recognizing the legitimacy of medical intervention, as seen in the advice given to Timothy to take wine for his stomach ailments (1 Timothy 5:23).
Christian Science, however, views prayer as primarily a method for achieving spiritual clarity and understanding God's perfection and the unreality of material existence. This metaphysical approach to prayer is intended to bring about healing by correcting false beliefs. Consequently, many Christian Scientists refrain from using conventional medicine, relying instead on prayer and spiritual healing methods. This reliance often leads to controversial situations where individuals, particularly children, may not receive necessary medical care.

Divergences from Traditional Christian Teachings

1. **The Nature of God and Reality**: Traditional Christianity maintains that God created both the spiritual and material worlds, declaring them "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Christian Science, however, asserts that the material world is an illusion, a misapprehension of true spiritual reality. This belief stems from Eddy's interpretation that only spiritual reality is genuine, and matter is a distortion of divine truth.
2. **Jesus Christ and Atonement**: Traditional Christianity holds that Jesus' death and resurrection provide atonement for humanity's sins, a central tenet of faith. Christian Science interprets Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection more as demonstrations of the unreality of death and the ultimate triumph of spiritual life over material beliefs. Eddy viewed Jesus as a "*Way-shower,*" emphasizing his role in illustrating the spiritual truths rather than focusing on the atoning sacrifice.
3. **Scriptural Interpretation**: While traditional Christianity adheres to a historical and literal interpretation of the Bible, Christian Science adopts a metaphysical and symbolic approach. Eddy's *"Science and Health"* serves as an interpretative guide, offering a lens through which the Bible is read and understood. This results in interpretations that often deviate from orthodox Christian exegesis.
4. **Health and Healing**: Traditional Christianity does not view sickness and suffering as illusory but recognizes them as real consequences of the fall, providing comfort and seeking divine intervention alongside medical treatment. Christian Science's exclusive reliance on spiritual healing often leads to conflicts with medical practices and public health policies. The belief in the unreality of sickness can result in neglect of practical medical care, which has significant ethical and legal implications.

In contemporary society, where medical advancements have significantly improved quality of life, Christian Science's stance on health and healing is particularly controversial. The refusal of conventional medical treatment has led to legal and ethical debates, especially concerning the welfare of children and vulnerable individuals. Public health officials and advocates often clash with Christian Science practices, especially when health outcomes are at stake.

Conclusion

Christian Science represents a unique and unorthodox branch of Christianity, with distinct beliefs about sin, sickness, and the role of prayer and healing. While it shares a commitment to following Jesus Christ, its interpretations diverge significantly from traditional Christian teachings. By understanding these differences, believers can better navigate the spiritual landscape, staying true to the core tenets of their faith while engaging respectfully with differing perspectives.
As Christians, it is crucial to ground our beliefs and practices in the truth of the Bible, continually seeking wisdom and discernment. As Proverbs 3:5-6 advises, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight*". By doing so, we can uphold the integrity of our faith amidst diverse theological viewpoints. Understanding and acknowledging the deviations of Christian Science from orthodox Christianity helps reinforce the foundational truths of the Christian faith and ensures we remain steadfast in our commitment to biblical teachings.

Related Articles

- Is Ecumenism Biblical or a Pathway to a One-World Religion?
- Is a Catholic Saved or Should S/He Consider Becoming a Christian?
- Who is the Jesus of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) ?
- Who are Branhamites and How Do Their Doctrines Stand in Contradiction to the Bible?
- What False Doctrine Distinguishes Seventh-day Adventists from Christian Denominations?
- Who is the Famous Babylonian goddess who Became Virgin Mary, the Ascribed Queen of Heaven?
- Are Jehovah's Witnesses Saved? Are They Christians? Is It Okay to Join Them If You Are a Christian?

Further Resources

- Explore Online Ministry Opportunities at Open Christian Ministries (USA)
- Explore Christian Business Services at the Center for Faith and Work (Rwanda)
- Pursue an Affordable Online Christian Degree at Open Christian University (USA)
- Kindly Share Your Question for Consideration in Future Articles. Click Here to Submit

← Back to blog

Comments (0)

Post Comment